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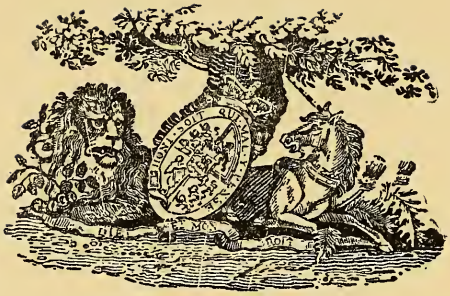
"The Natchez Country"

Rediscovered beside Mississippi's Waters!

RICHARD AUBREY McLEMORE



"Were American Newcomen to do naught else, our work is well done if we succeed in sharing with America a strengthened inspiration to continue the struggle towards a nobler Civilization—through wider knowledge and understanding of the hopes, ambitions, and deeds of leaders in the past who have upheld Civilization's material progress. As we look backward, let us look forward."

—CHARLES PENROSE
Senior Vice-President for North America
The Newcomen Society of England

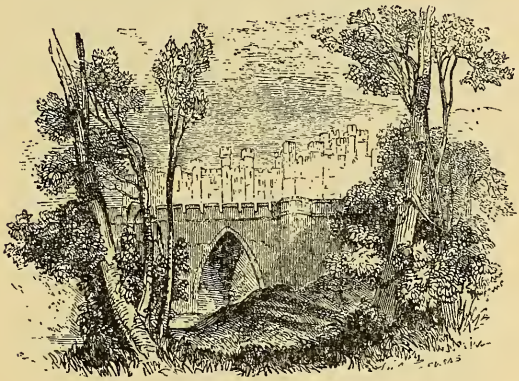
This statement, crystallizing a broad purpose of the society, was first read at the Newcomen Meeting at New York World's Fair on August 5, 1939, when American Newcomen were guests of The British Government

"Actorum Memores simul affectamus Agenda"

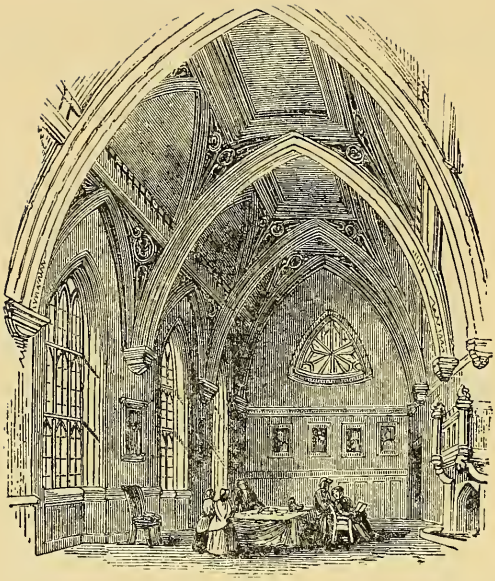
"THE NATCHEZ COUNTRY"

Rediscovered beside Mississippi's Waters!

An Address at Natchez



AMERICAN NEWCOMEN, *through the years, has honored numerous geographical regions, both in the United States of America and in Canada, and has honored the deeds of pioneer leaders. Such a Newcomen manuscript is this, dealing with the "Natchez Country" in the State of Mississippi and with the lives of her distinguished sons. The courage, vision, initiative, and abiding Faith of these Americans have created Mississippi's proud heritage!*



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—Richard Aubrey McLemore

"The Natchez Country"

Rediscovered beside Mississippi's Waters!

RICHARD AUBREY McLEMORE, PH.D.

MEMBER OF THE NEWCOMEN SOCIETY
PRESIDENT
MISSISSIPPI SOUTHERN COLLEGE
HATTIESBURG
MISSISSIPPI

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This Newcomen Address, dealing with the history of "The Natchez Country," was delivered at the "1955 Mississippi Dinner" of The Newcomen Society in North America, held in the Eola Hotel, at Natchez, Mississippi, U.S.A., when Dr. McLemore was the guest of honor, on March 17, 1955

SET UP, PRINTED AND BOUND IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA FOR THE NEWCOMEN PUBLICATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA BY PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

INTRODUCTION OF DR. MCLEMORE, AT NATCHEZ ON MARCH 17, 1955, BY GERARD H. BRANDON, PARTNER OF BRANDON, BRANDON, HORNSBY AND HAND OF NATCHEZ; MEMBER OF THE MISSISSIPPI COMMITTEE, IN THE NEWCOMEN SOCIETY IN NORTH AMERICA.

My fellow members of Newcomen:

It is a distinct honor to Historic Natchez, shared by its members of the Mississippi Committee in The Newcomen Society in North America, to be host to one who as honoree comes to do honor to the host, Natchez, which in turn becomes the honoree. The pride which we of this modest city feel is greatly enhanced by having as our guest of honor so distinguished a scholar and historian of our State and of this section of our Commonwealth.

❦ ❦

Tonight I have been granted the privilege of presenting Dr. Richard Aubrey McLemore, President of Mississippi Southern College, at Hattiesburg; our fellow member of the Mississippi Committee, in The Newcomen Society.

❦ ❦

In coming to address us, Dr. McLemore has not journeyed far from home. He, too, is of South Mississippi, than which there can be no farther—or deeper—South. He was born in Perry County, received his high school education in Hattiesburg, traveled no farther North than Clinton to receive his Bachelor's Degree at Mississippi College, nor than to Nashville for his Master's and Doctor of Philosophy Degrees at George Peabody College for Teachers and at Vanderbilt University, respectively.

APR 11 1955

This seems to bring us down to the Year 1933. I have refrained from mentioning the date of my commencement of this narrative, in order to accord our speaker ample latitude in time for personal recollections of events and personalities, should he desire to invoke literary license in historic discourse.

Taking time out only for some further studies in Paris during the Summer of 1937, our guest has devoted himself to that very finest of professions, the instruction of the youth of our Country, to his own further enlightenment and education, and to documenting the results of his research and experiences.

Dr. McLemore commenced his career as teacher in the public schools of his State. He next held the position of Dean of the Jones County Junior College, from 1926 until 1934, during which term he met and married Nannie Pitts. He was a Teaching Fellow at Vanderbilt for three years, and for a like term Associate Professor of History at Judson College, Marion, Alabama.

It seems that as speedily as possible Dr. McLemore returned to that part of Mississippi dearest to him—where he could best serve the young people of his State in his chosen field of work and be nearer his first home. In 1938, he became Professor of History and Head of Social Studies Department of Mississippi Southern College; Dean of the College in 1945; and now President of one of the great and fine institutions of higher learning in Mississippi.

Dr. McLemore is the author of numerous historical treatises, several books, texts, and reviews. He has traveled extensively and received many honors; yet in his busy life he has delighted to participate actively in civic and community service.

Scholastically, the prime interest of our distinguished guest of honor has been in such subjects as that to which he now will

address himself. That, too, has been the avocation of Mrs. McLemore, who with him has delved deeply into the past in historical research.

Amongst the more notable of books written by Dr. McLemore are those entitled: *Franco-American Diplomatic Relations from 1816-36*, *Mississippi Through Four Centuries*, an *Outline of Mississippi History*, and *Our Nation's Story*. In all these subjects Natchez has played a conspicuous part, politically, economically, and culturally.

It is appropriate for American Newcomen to consider such subjects; because, as has been said by our Senior Vice-President, Dr. Charles Penrose:

> *"Were American Newcomen to do naught else, our work is well done if we succeed in sharing with America a strengthened inspiration to continue toward a nobler Civilization—through wider knowledge and understanding of the hopes, ambitions, and deeds of leaders in the past who have upheld Civilization's material progress.*
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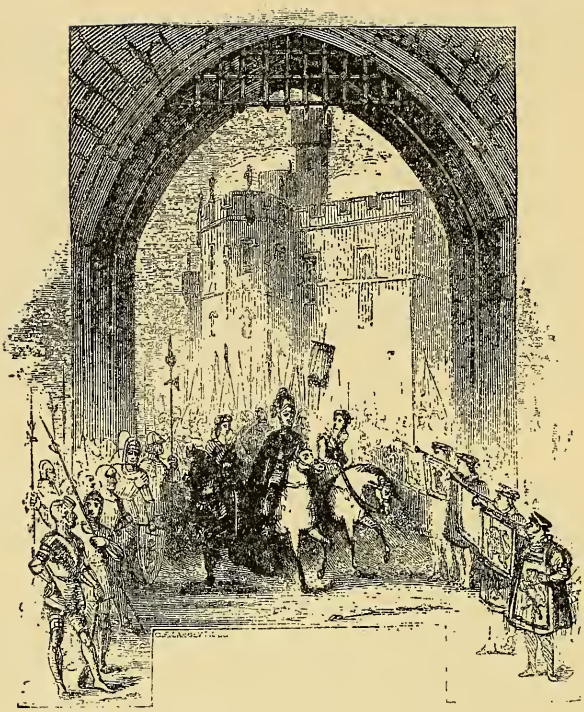


My fellow members of Newcomen:

THE Natchez country is an area on the lower Mississippi River lying between the thirty-first and thirty-second degrees north latitude. It lies about the same distance north of the equator as Alexandria, Egypt; Bagdad, Iran; or Shanghai, China. The civilizations that developed in all of these centers, including the Natchez country, were nurtured by great rivers.

The Foundation

The geological basis on which civilization in the Natchez country developed has been only partially revealed. Probably the most distinguishing visible characteristic is the bluff hills. These hills form a belt some fifteen or twenty miles wide. They are covered with a loess soil described as an aeolian tertiary, sedimentary deposit, consisting of very fine yellow, calcareous loam, occurring

over considerable tracts. In many places it has a thickness of fifty or sixty feet. The fertility of this soil was a major factor in attracting early settlers.

The Indians

Before the coming of the white man, this land was occupied by the Indians. There was a definite relationship between these Natchez Indians and those who resided in other parts of the Americas. When the white man arrived, the Natchez group was concentrated in nine to twelve villages scattered throughout the district. It is difficult to identify the sites of these ancient villages, but the location of the famous White Apple Village has been determined beyond any reasonable doubt.

The Natchez Indians impressed travelers as "strong, robust and of a proud air." The estimates of the character of these people by early visitors varied widely. A friendly visitor described them:

"The Natchez nation was one of the most estimable in the colony in the first times, not only according to their own tradition, but also according to those of other people, to whom their greatness and the beauty of their customs gave as much jealousy as admiration."

In the early years of European settlement the Indians were usually friendly and helpful to the newcomers. As the number of European settlers increased, the Indians sensed the conflict between the two civilizations and resorted to war in an effort to protect their heritage. The European civilization was the more powerful and in the course of the conflict gradually destroyed the more backward Indian culture. A few physical remains, a multitude of place names, and a great store of interesting legends are the heritage of the Natchez region from this culture.

Explorations

The Natchez country was one of the first districts explored by Europeans in the opening of the New World. There were several

expeditions along the coast within a few years after Columbus' famous voyage. The most important Spanish expedition in the Southeastern portion of the North American Continent was the one led by Hernando De Soto. After four years of wandering, this expedition reached, in 1542, a point on the western bank of the river near Natchez. De Soto thought his explorations had been fruitless because he had failed to discover any great deposits of gold or silver or find any collections of precious stones. The men who recorded the account of his journey have left us excellent descriptions of the splendid land through which the party passed and of the great potential wealth-producing capacity of the district.

It was a century and a quarter after De Soto before Europeans again trod the soil of the Natchez country. The newcomers were visitors from Canada carrying the flag of France. Led by LaSalle, the party found the Natchez country one of the most attractive portions of the great Mississippi River valley. The glowing accounts they gave to King Louis XIV prompted the French sovereign to lend support to LaSalle's plan for the establishment of a colony near the mouth of the Mississippi River. This plan failed, but the obvious value of a settlement near the mouth of the mighty Mississippi inspired the Spanish, British, and French governments to undertake the project. The French were successful in the race, planting the first colony at Fort Maurepas in 1699.

A French Colony

The French faced many difficulties in their new colonial venture. One of their major problems was the selection of suitable sites for the colonists. In order to keep the Indians along the Mississippi River under control, a settlement was established at Fort Rosalie in 1716. This was the beginning of a permanent settlement in the Natchez country.

Fort Rosalie proved to be an excellent site for a colony. The rich lands produced an abundance of food. The numerous Indians furnished an excellent market for traders. Inevitably, however,

differences arose between the Indians and the French settlers. These differences increased in intensity, finally causing the Indians to determine to destroy the settlers. The plans were so well managed that the Indians captured the fort, killing the men, and taking the women and slaves as prisoners. This was the worst massacre that has occurred on Mississippi soil.

The French realized that their control of the Mississippi River valley rested upon their ability to overcome the Indian menace. The French governor lost no time in sending an army to recapture Fort Rosalie and to punish the Indians. The army was successful in recapturing the fort and in rescuing the women, children, and Negro slaves. The French failed, however, to regain an absolute mastery over the Indians. This fact prevented the re-establishment of Fort Rosalie and contributed to the ultimate loss by France of the Natchez territory.

A British Colony

Since France was unsuccessful in her world-wide rivalry with Great Britain, the Natchez country became a pawn in international politics. A part of the price France paid for her defeat was the cession of all of her territorial claims east of the Mississippi River to Great Britain. The Natchez country became a part of British West Florida, which had Pensacola as its colonial capital.

It was during the period of British occupancy that the modern development of the Natchez country began. The old French Fort Rosalie had fallen apart and the once prosperous settlement had disappeared. The British renamed the site Fort Panmure, but they stationed no military forces there. The Indians were hostile. They had turned back a British expedition under Major Loftus when he attempted to ascend the river in 1764.

The British soon discovered the great attractiveness of the Natchez country. Montfort Browne, lieutenant governor of British West Florida, made a visit to the Natchez region in the spring of 1768. In his report to the London government he said: "From

the fort may be discovered the most charming prospects in the world, extensive plains intermixed with beautiful hills, and small rivers; here are, my lord, fruit trees of most excellent kinds, the grape, peach, plum, apricot, apple, pear, figs, mulberry, cherry, persimmon, medlars, and strawberries as good in their kind as any in the world and in as great abundance. . . . The nuts common in this part of the province are walnuts, chestnuts, hickory, and filbert."

Browne's enthusiasm for the Natchez country was shared by other visitors. News of the richness of this new portion of the British empire was not long in reaching the ears of the great entrepreneurs of the age. A map in the hands of the Mississippi River Commission, entitled: *Part of the River Mississippi from Manchac to the River Yazous for Governor Chester by Wm. Wilton*, shows more than two hundred claims. Among the largest and earliest of these claims were that of the Earl of Eglinton for 20,000 acres and that of Samuel Hannay for 10,000 acres. Thaddeus Lyman received a large grant, and Amos Ogden, who made an honest attempt to induce settlers to come to the region, received 25,000 acres. Other grants were to Thomas Hutchins, 25,000 acres; Peter Van Brugh Livingston, 25,000 acres; James and Evan Jones and associates, 25,000 acres; and Colonel Anthony Hutchins, 152,000 acres.

The beginning of a steady flow of permanent settlers into the Natchez country and the problems they confronted are reflected in a letter which John McIntire, one of the first immigrants, sent to Governor Peter Chester on July 19, 1770.

"I make bold to let your Excellency know that we are to the number of Eighty Souls arrived from Fort Pitt in design to settle at Fort Natchez, and that from the back parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania upwards of one hundred Families depends on our encouragement to set out for this place: On our arriving here we find the land exceeding good but are at a great loss for want of the Country being settled to procure the present necessaries of life

and safety from the Indians who we find has disturbed Mr. Bradley and almost destroyed the Fort: We most Humbly beg your Excellency's and Councils advice in our present state and we make no doubt we shall be encouraged by the sending a party of His Majesty's Troops to protect us and allow us any bounty that is usually given to any of His Majesty's Subjects setling in this Colony: There is among our number several Tradesman who will want emply such as Carpenters and Smiths, and as to myself I have been experienced in most Merchantile and Mechanical business, and I would be glad to serve the settlement in any useful Employ. We are at a loss for a Surveyor in this Country which business I am capable of: I have all furniture for erecting a Saw-Mil and Grist Mill which I intend to erect Immediately if encouraged by your Excellency and Council. We humbly crave a Copy of the Laws of this Colony to know our duty and how to apply for Land. The bearer Mr. Huay sets out to bring his family and his Neighbours for this settlement if encouraged by your Excellency's Answer."

Governor Chester recognized the significance of this group and and the great promise for the future. He lent every aid possible to these settlers, and the territory experienced a steady flow of immigrants. By the time the vicissitudes of the Revolutionary War made their impact upon the territory, the Natchez country could count some 3100 souls. As a further indication of the increasing importance of the region, Governor Chester ordered in February 1776, the surveyor to lay off a town at Natchez.

The citizens of Natchez were satisfied with British rule. Governor Chester had urged the loyalists in the seaboard colonies to seek asylum in British West Florida. The unrest in those colonies was responsible for some of the migration to the Natchez area. When the Revolutionary War broke out there was no movement in British West Florida to join in the rebellion.

The strategic location of Natchez, however, involved its citizens in the conflict. The Continental Congress wanted to secure mili-

tary supplies from Spanish New Orleans. Captain James Willing undertook the mission, but he met resistance at Natchez. A temporary victory for the Willing faction was overthrown by the loyalists under the guidance of Anthony Hutchins. The triumph of this faction was short-lived, for the entrance of Spain into the conflict prompted the Spanish under Governor Galvez to take over Natchez and the whole of British West Florida.

A Spanish Colony

The administration of the affairs of the Natchez country by the Spanish authorities was generally approved by the settlers. There was no migration of Spanish people into the territory. Natchez was fortunate in having a series of Spanish governors who were very popular.

One of the major diplomatic problems of the period was the struggle between the United States of America and Spain for control of the Mississippi River Valley. In the treaty of peace with Great Britain, the United States had accepted the Mississippi River as her western boundary and the 31st parallel as the southern boundary. Spain refused to recognize this agreement and by virtue of her occupation of the territory was successful in resisting the American claims. The United States was not strong enough to force any decision in the matter; but when Spain became deeply involved in European politics, she found it desirable to reach an amicable agreement with the United States. Pinckney's treaty settled the principal differences between the countries, conceding the territorial claims of the United States and granting the right of deposit at New Orleans.

One of the most interesting features of the development during the Spanish period was the attempt to find a staple crop. The Spanish encouraged the settlers of the Natchez region to engage in tobacco culture. For a time this proved very profitable. In a few years, however, the Spanish learned that they could get better tobacco from Kentucky and Tennessee. The planters turned to

the culture of indigo, but this proved to be unprofitable. The economic outlook for the area was very dark. At this moment, Eli Whitney perfected the cotton gin. Within a few short months his invention had been introduced into the Natchez country, and the basis for a successful cotton economy had been laid.

A Territory of the United States of America

The United States Government officially took possession of the Natchez country in March 1798. The same type of governmental organization was set up for this newest section of the United States as had been established for the old Northwest Territory. The President of the United States was authorized to appoint a governor, a secretary of the territory, and three judges. These officials were responsible for making and executing the laws. President Adams chose as the first governor of the territory, Winthrop Sargent. Governor Sargent had served successfully as the secretary of the old Northwest Territory. He had previously served in the Revolutionary Army where he had attracted the favorable attention of General George Washington.

Sargent's administration was characterized by significant developments in the territory. The most important of these developments was the organization of the district into counties. Adams and Pickering Counties were organized in 1799, and Washington County in 1800. The development of democratic government was promoted by the establishment of an elective legislative council. Sargent also undertook to organize the militia, a very important factor on the frontier since there was the ever-present danger of interference by the Indians and the none too friendly neighbors in New Orleans.

Sargent's administration was too federalistic in character to please the Natchez community. Narsworthy Hunter was appointed by the citizens to represent them before congress to "secure a redress of the grievances." The petition which he carried was signed by Gerard Brandon, Thomas M. Green, Cato West, David Greenleaf, Randall Gibson, and others. President Adams and the Federalist Party supported Sargent, but when the Republican Party took

control of the national government President Jefferson found that Sargent's administration "with whatever meritorious intentions conducted, had not been so fortunate as to secure the general harmony, and the mutual attachment between the people and the public functionaries, so particularly necessary for the prosperity and happiness of an infant establishment." W. C. C. Claiborne was appointed as territorial governor.

Claiborne's administration was marked by some very significant events. The most important of these events involved the use of the Mississippi River. Pinckney's treaty had provided that the United States had the privilege of free navigation of the Mississippi River and the right of deposit in New Orleans. The change in political conditions in Europe resulted in the transfer of Louisiana from Spain to France. Probably one of the consequences of this transfer was the revoking of the right of deposit. This caused a great uproar throughout the entire west. Jefferson found that it was very likely that the Westerners would take affairs into their own hands and seize New Orleans if the national government did not take very aggressive action. Governor Claiborne was among the leaders in forcing President Jefferson's hand. He wrote Jefferson that "the people . . . are greatly agitated by the suspension of the right of deposit . . ." and ". . . we have . . . about 2,000 militia, well organized and we can easily take possession of New Orleans. . . ."

Jefferson wanted to avoid war. He wrote Governor Claiborne urging him not to take any precipitate steps while he was continuing negotiations in Europe. The negotiations through Edward Livingston and James Monroe were successful and the Louisiana Purchase was added to the United States. Natchez had escaped one of the gravest threats to her economic well being.

Another significant development in Claiborne's administration was the removal of the capital from the city of Natchez to the town

of Washington. This development came as a result of the prejudice of the frontiersmen against the aristocracy of the Natchez community. Washington remained the capital of the Mississippi Territory throughout the territorial era. After the territory had been organized into a state, the capital was removed from the town of Washington and the community began to dwindle.

The Natchez country was an isolated section of the United States. It was very difficult for people from the East to reach the territory. If they came by water, they either had to go down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, or they were forced to make the long journey around Florida, across the Gulf of Mexico, and up the Mississippi. The only overland routes were the historic Natchez Trace and the Old National Road. These overland routes slowly developed until travel by carriage was possible. One of the achievements of Claiborne's administration was the securing of permission of the Indians to widen and improve the Natchez Trace. This overland artery became the principal means of travel from the Natchez country to Tennessee and the East.

The Indians were a menace throughout the territorial period. The Indians in the Southwest had the same grievances against the settlers as did the Indians in other parts of the country. They saw the settlers take the choice portions of their land and deplete the game on their hunting preserves.

The first open hostility came with the attack of a group of Indians on a mail carrier in July, 1813. This was followed by an attempt on the part of the settlers to gain revenge for the Indians' depredations. At the Battle of Burnt Corn Creek the avenging settlers were routed by the Indians. This gave the Indians an exaggerated sense of their power. With the encouragement of the Spanish leaders at Pensacola, the Indians organized a war party which set out to destroy the settlements in the Tombigbee River valley. The first assault of the Indians was on crowded Fort Mims.

Here approximately 550 settlers and militia had been concentrated. The Indian attack was completely successful with a mere handful of the defenders escaping with their lives.

The uprising of the Indians was crushed by General Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. The power of the Indians was so completely broken that they were forced to sign the humiliating treaty of Fort Jackson. In the years that followed the Indians might resent the encroachment of the settlers, but they did not have sufficient power to offer any effective resistance. The great Indian land cessions of 1820, 1830, and 1832 resulted in the opening of the entire area to settlement by the white man. Most of the Indians were removed to the Indian territory west of the Mississippi River.

The trouble with the Indians in the Old Southwest came at the same time the United States was engaged in the War of 1812 with Great Britain. In 1814 it became apparent that Britain was preparing for an attack on the southwestern corner of the United States. The United States prepared to meet the invasion by concentrating available troops in the area and designating General Jackson as their commander. General Jackson was already well known in Mississippi. He had engaged in many trading ventures in the Natchez country and had married Rachel Donelson Robards while she was an exile in the Natchez country.

Jackson assembled his troops at New Orleans. A small cavalry group under the command of General Thomas Hinds was organized in the Natchez country to assist Jackson in the military operations. This group rendered distinguished service. The capital of Mississippi was named for the victor at New Orleans and the county in which it is located, for the Mississippi commander.

In spite of the troubles with the Indians and the hardships incidental to the War of 1812, the Mississippi Territory had grown very rapidly. The largest increase in the number of settlers had come in the Natchez country. These people had petitioned as early

as 1812 for admission into the Union as a State. The war forced Congress to postpone consideration of the petition, but when the conflict had ended Congress was ready to resume its state-making function. Congress decided that the district should be divided into two parts, one to be known as Alabama territory and the other area to be organized as a state. The fourteen counties which had the privilege of framing a constitution were all located in the southern portion of the new State. Adams County was the most populous and the wealthiest of the fourteen counties.

The constitutional convention was held at Washington. The convention included forty-seven delegates, of whom five—David Holmes, George Poindexter, Walter Leake, Gerard C. Brandon, and Abram M. Scott—were to become governors. The convention chose the name Mississippi over Washington for the new State and framed the first constitution. This constitution was submitted to the voters for approval, and after they had given it their endorsement it was submitted to Congress. On the basis of the constitution, Mississippi was admitted to the Union in December, 1817.

Natchez was the scene of the first meeting of the State Legislature. However, a yellow fever epidemic was raging in the city, and the session was transferred to Washington. Thereafter no meeting of the legislature was held in the city of Natchez. Political leadership passed away from Mississippi's greatest economic and cultural center primarily because of the opposition which existed in the frontier communities.

The Golden Years

The era of the greatest prosperity for the Natchez country was the first half of the Nineteenth Century. This was the period when a great western migration was carrying settlers into mid-America and to the Pacific Coast. The broad plains of the Middle West, the grasslands of Texas, and the gold hills of California held out beckoning hands to prospective settlers. None of these areas offered greater advantages than the Natchez country. This was the era when cotton was king, and those who produced the white gold

were the favored masters of finance. So great was the wealth-producing capacity of the Natchez country that it has been asserted that when the United States had but seventy millionaires seven of them resided in this area.

Eli Whitney deserves perhaps the greatest credit for making the Natchez country, although he never visited the area. The cotton gin made the culture of cotton profitable. William Dunbar was one of the first to realize the possibilities which this new invention opened for the area. In 1799 Dunbar produced on his plantation, known as "The Forest," "20,000 pounds of clean cotton." His biographer wrote: "Becoming absorbed in the cultivation of cotton, he began the study of scientific invention and discoveries in connection with it. He introduced the square bale for the packing of cotton, ordered a screw press made at Philadelphia according to his plans, and when informed that the press would cost $1,000, he determined to indemnify himself by extracting the oil from the cottonseed. This he had discovered was 'between the fat and drying oils, resembling linseed in color and tenacity, but perhaps less drying.' This new discovery made many years before cottonseed was utilized in any manner, even for feeding, greatly increased the value of cotton production."

Winthrop Sargent came to the territory as the first territorial governor. After Sargent was removed from the governorship, he devoted himself to his cotton plantation. He had married the lovely Maria McIntosh Williams, whose lands formed the nucleus of his estate. Under his careful supervision, the acres produced such abundant crops that Sargent became one of the most affluent members of the community. His new wealth enabled him to buy Maria's old homestead. He renamed the home, Gloucester, and made many architectural changes. It stands today as one of the most interesting of the ante-bellum mansions in the area.

Peter Little about 1820 built a home which he named Rosalie because it was near the site of the old French fort. Little was an

operator of a sawmill, but his wealth rested upon cotton. The magnificence of this home and the interesting people who lived there brought it into the very heart of the history of Natchez.

Eliza Low had been left in Peter Little's care when her father and mother were swept away by one of those dreadful yellow fever epidemics. The status of ward was soon changed to that of wife. Eliza's piety became noticeable after she had heard the great frontier evangelist, Lorenzo Dow. During her schooling in the East, her reputation as a pious girl increased. Probably the most distinctive characteristic of her long life in Natchez was her devotion to the Methodist Church. The steady stream of clerical visitors to Rosalie so irritated Peter that he built the Parsonage within a stone's throw of Rosalie as a haven for the itinerant ministers. Religion grew and prospered in the Natchez area, nurtured by the devotion of an increasing number of adherents.

Perhaps the crowning exhibit of the cotton era is Stanton Hall. The history of this impressive and expansive masterpiece reflects many of the characteristics of a frontier community. The opportunities which Natchez offered an ambitious youngster attracted the twenty-one-year-old Frederick Stanton of Belfast, Ireland. He made a fortune in trade. In the last decade before the Civil War, he erected the immense structure that bears his name. The lavish furnishings were purchased in Europe and transported to America on a chartered steamer. Frederick enjoyed the home with his family for one short year before his death. Later the turmoil and depression of the Civil War and Reconstruction periods so impoverished the family and the section that the property estimated to be worth $550,000 sold for a paltry $7,000.

The Civil War

The bitter issues that led to the Civil War were interwoven into the life of the citizens of the Natchez country. John A. Quitman, one of the section's most distinguished citizens, had been a leader in promoting the expansion of slave territory. The military laurels he won in the war with Mexico helped him to win the governorship and although he was defeated for re-election by Henry S.

Foote, an advocate of acceptance of the Compromise of 1850, he lived long enough to win a place in Congress and to see his principles triumph over those of Foote.

Natchez gave enthusiastic support to the war. The ministers offered their church bells to be molded into cannon. "Needle regiments" sent supplies to the boys in camp. On plantations cotton was abandoned for the production of foodstuffs. Company after company of young men went out to serve on various battlefields.

Natchez was of little strategic importance to either side. Federal forces ascended the river in 1862 and occupied Natchez in 1863. General Grant spent some time in Natchez, and General Gresham was on one occasion the military commander of the area. The blighting effect of the war on the Natchez country was not the military operations that accompanied the conflict, but rather the aftermath—the uprooting of the economic, social, and political systems by which the people had come to live.

The Dark Years

The Civil War loosed the Natchez country from its moorings and imposed problems upon the community that were to plague its citizens for many years. The economic problems were the most pressing. Food did not become scarce in the Natchez country until near the close of the war. The wholesale removal and desertion of the Negroes from the plantations resulted in a catastrophic decrease in production. The situation was made more acute by the pilfering of guerrilla bands. In one of the garden spots of the world food was at a premium.

The necessity of producing an adequate amount of foodstuff forced the planters and the Negroes to work together. The misguided efforts of the Federal Congress and the Freedman's Bureau complicated the readjustment problems. The attempt to impose a labor contract requiring the planter to "pay cash wages and give just treatment, wholesome rations, comfortable clothing, quarters, fuel, and medical attendance, and the opportunity for instruction of children" was too cumbersome and impractical. Through a process of trial and error, the people of the Natchez country finally worked out a satisfactory economic relationship.

The new economic policy that was to dominate the Natchez country for many decades has been brilliantly described by William Alexander Percy in his *Lanterns on the Levee*.

"I have land which you need, and you have muscle which I need; let's put what we've got in the same pot and call it ours. I'll give you all the land you can work, a house to live in, a garden plot and room to raise children, hogs, and cows if you can come by them, and all the wood you want to cut for fuel. I'll direct and oversee you. I'll get you a doctor when you are sick. Until the crop comes in I'll try to keep you from going hungry or naked in so far as I am able. I'll pay the taxes and I'll furnish the mules and plows and gear and whatever else is necessary to make a crop. This is what I promise to do. You will plant and cultivate and gather the crop as I direct. That is what you will promise to do. When the crop is picked, half of it will be mine and half of it yours. If I have supplied you with money or food or clothing or anything else during this year, I will charge it against your half of the crop. I shall handle the selling of the cotton and cottonseed because I know more than you do about their value. But the corn you may sell or eat or use for feed as you like. If the price of cotton is good, we shall both make something. If it is bad, neither of us will make anything, but I shall probably lose the place and you will lose nothing because you have nothing to lose. It's a hard contract these hard times for both of us, but it's just and self-respecting and if we both do our part and have a little luck, we can both prosper under it."

The new economic policy enabled the Natchez country to regain stability. Cotton continued to be the principal source of income, but the depressed prices for the fleecy staple and the inefficient labor system imposed an almost insuperable obstacle to economic progress. The appearance in 1908 of the boll weevil added another burden to the impoverished economy. The future of the Natchez country was never darker or less promising.

The New Natchez

The tremendous changes that have occurred in the Natchez country within recent years have effected another revolution.

Manufacturing employs more than twice as many people as agriculture. The new manufacturing establishments are largely dependent upon the forests for their raw material. The excellent water transportation has made it possible for some industries to bring raw materials from a distance. The same river that has meant much to the Natchez country through the centuries plays a significant role in the area's modern history.

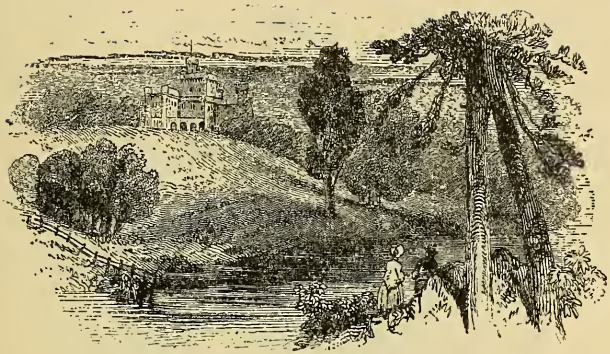
The first visitors to the Natchez country failed to find the yellow gold they were seeking. When the settlers discovered the adaptability of the soil to cotton culture, and when the industrial revolution in England, a movement in which our illustrious patron played a significant part, opened up the markets of the world to the silky, white lint, Natchez had a "white gold" that was to bring far more wealth into the country than the most visionary of the early explorers ever dreamed possible. Today, the "white gold" is being supplanted by "black gold" from the bowels of the earth. Petroleum has been found in such abundance that the area has become the most productive in the State.

The people of Natchez have been able to adjust to changing conditions. The same family names that have been prominent throughout the history of the region continue to have an honored place in the new Natchez. These people have gathered around them a great group of American citizens dedicated to the development of the area in the true American tradition. The new opportunities which these citizens have opened have resulted in Natchez having the greatest population growth in its long history. In the last decade the increase was 48.7 percent.

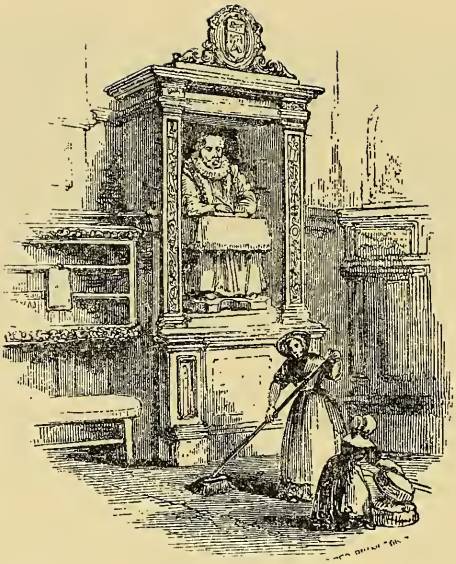
The Natchez of tomorrow will be built on a romantic, colorful, and historic past. The leaders of the new Natchez will be characterized by the same vision, courage, and determination that characterized the leaders who have gone before.

THE END

"Actorum Memores simul affectamus Agenda!"



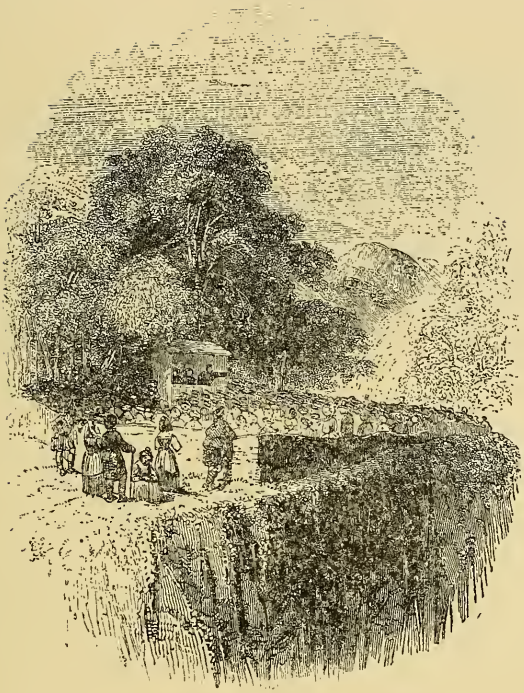
THIS NEWCOMEN ADDRESS, *dealing with the history of the Natchez Country, was delivered at the "1955 Mississippi Dinner" of The Newcomen Society in North America, held at Natchez, Mississippi, U.S.A., on March 17, 1955.* DR. MCLEMORE, *the guest of honor, was introduced by* GERARD H. BRANDON, *Partner of Brandon, Brandon, Hornsby and Hand, of Natchez; Member of the Mississippi Committee, in American Newcomen. The dinner was presided over by* REX I. BROWN, LL.D., *Chairman, Mississippi Power & Light Company, Jackson; Chairman of the Mississippi Committee, in this international Society.*



"It was during the period of British occupancy that the modern development of the Natchez country began.

"The British soon discovered the great attractiveness of the Natchez country. News of the richness of this portion of the British Empire was not long in reaching the ears of the important entrepreneurs of the age."

—Richard Aubrey McLemore



"The Natchez of tomorrow will be built on a romantic, colorful, and historic past. The leaders of the new Natchez will be characterized by the same vision, courage, and determination that characterized the leaders who have gone before."

—Richard Aubrey McLemore

American Newcomen, *interested always in those phases of America's History which have made contributions to Material Civilization, takes satisfaction in this ably told Newcomen manuscript, colorful in its recital of the courageous and determined efforts by the early colonizers in the Natchez Country. It is another stirring chapter in our Nation's dramatic history—of the America which can take pride in the resources and achievements*

of the State of Mississippi—

and of her people!

THE NEWCOMEN SOCIETY

in North America

MORE THAN *30 years ago, the late L. F. Loree (1858-1940) of New York, then dean of American railroad presidents, established a group now known as "American Newcomen" and interested in Material History, as distinguished from political history. Its objectives center in the beginnings, growth, development, contributions, and influence of Industry, Transportation, Communication, the Utilities, Mining, Agriculture, Banking, Finance, Economics, Insurance, Education, Invention, and the Law—these and correlated historical fields. In short, the background of those factors which have contributed or are contributing to the progress of Mankind.*

The Newcomen Society in North America is a voluntary association, with headquarters in Uwchlan Township, Chester County, within the fox-hunting countryside of Eastern Pennsylvania and 32 miles West of the City of Philadelphia. Here also is located The Thomas Newcomen Library, a reference collection open for research and dealing with the subjects to which the Society devotes attention.

Meetings are held throughout the United States of America and across Canada at which Newcomen Addresses are presented by leaders in their respective fields. These manuscripts represent a broadest coverage of phases of Material History involved, both American and Canadian.

The approach in most cases has been a life-story of corporate organizations, interpreted through the ambitions, the successes and failures, and the ultimate achievements of those pioneers whose efforts laid the foundations of the particular enterprise.

The Society's name perpetuates the life and work of Thomas Newcomen (1663-1729), the British pioneer, whose valuable contributions in improvements to the newly invented Steam Engine brought him lasting fame in the field of the Mechanic Arts. The Newcomen Engines, whose period of use was from 1712 to 1775, paved a way for the Industrial Revolution. Newcomen's inventive genius preceded by more than 50 years the brilliant work in Steam by the world-famous James Watt.

Members of American Newcomen, when in Europe, are invited by the Dartmouth Newcomen Association to visit the home of Thomas Newcomen at Dartmouth in South Devonshire, England, where the festival of "Newcomen Day" is celebrated each year on the anniversary, August 16th, of his death.

"The roads you travel so briskly
lead out of dim antiquity,
and you study the past chiefly because
of its bearing on the living present
and its promise for the future."

—LIEUTENANT GENERAL JAMES G. HARBORD,
K.C.M.G., D.S.M., LL.D., U.S. ARMY (RET.)
(1866-1947)

Late American Member of Council at London
The Newcomen Society of England

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